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LOCAL NEWS

Hacienda, Bishop Ranch business parks lauded

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STAFF WRITER

Two Valley business parks are the first in California to be designated "Best Workplaces for Commuters Districts" by a coalition led by the Environmental Protection Agency. Hacienda Business Park in Pleasanton and the Bishop Ranch Business Park in San Ramon got the nod in a new category of the Best Workplaces for Commuters list that a number of Valley businesses already belong to.

Only four other districts across the country have qualified for the designation, including employment centers in Denver and Atlanta. A district is an area where the transit benefits extend beyond individual employers, like downtown centers, business parks and shopping malls.

"I think, yes, it does help us to be able to say, hey, we're ... providing something that's head and shoulders above the rest," said James Paxson, Hacienda's general manager.

Paxson was honored earlier this month as a "Clean Air Champion" for his efforts to replace the solo drive as the commute method of choice. Both business parks offer a range of commuter benefits, including free on-site showers for bikers, cash incentives for joining and forming carpools and a free ride home in case of emergency.

At Hacienda, about one-fifth of the employees use the free bus passes the park issues, Paxson said. One of Bishop Ranch's most popular programs is a free express bus pass worth about \$900 a year, said Transportation Program Manager Marci McGuire. Surveys at both business parks indicate that about 30 percent of employees use alternative commute methods to get to work.

"[That's] much more than you would expect to see in a typical sub urban office environment, especially one that has free parking," Paxson said.

Instead of losing riders in the past few years, when many transit systems have struggled to stay afloat, the park's ridership has "skyrocketed," McGuire said.

According to bus surveys the park has done, about 12 percent of passengers don't even own cars, she said. Hacienda and Bishop Ranch join a long list of Bay Area employers that the coalition lauds for their commitment to transit.

"By offering commuter benefits, an organization with 1,000 employees can save its employees \$13,000 in taxes and \$160,000 in gas, parking and vehicles costs each year," said Robin Snyder, the EPA's national program manager. "Employers that locate in Best Workplaces for Commuters Districts are saving their employees time and money, while reducing congestion and air pollution."